

Troy-Libby Highway
Troy vicinity
Lincoln County
Montana

HAER No. MT-66

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Troy-Libby Highway

HAER No. MT-66

Location: Several discontinuous segments of the highway lie between Troy and Libby in Sections 30 and 32, Township 31 North, Range 31 West; Sections 14, 15, 18, and 23-25, Township 31 North, Range 32 West; and Sections 13-15, 18-20, and 22, Township 31 North, Range 33 West. The segments begin about 2-1/2 miles west of Libby and end about 1-1/2 miles east of Troy.

UTM: Zone 11

Troy end: 583330 Easting
5366240 Northing

Libby end: 603745 Easting
5362615 Northing

Quads: Libby, Montana (1963, photorevised 1983)

Scenery Mountain, Montana (1963, photorevised 1983)

Kootenai Falls, Montana (1963)

Date of Construction: 1912-1915

Present Owner: Various owners, but mostly owned by the U.S. Forest Service

Present Use: The longest intact segments are used as recreation trails by hikers and cross-country skiers.

Significance: The highway contributed to the economic and political unification of Lincoln County by being the first road to link Troy and Libby that could be used with any degree of consistency. Its construction was stimulated by and contributed to emerging local, regional, and national interests in tourism. The highway is a major and early instance of federal aid for road building in Montana. The construction project was closely associated with Paul D. Pratt, who played an important role in early road construction in Lincoln County and in Montana. Finally, the highway illustrates 1910's road construction techniques through varied topography.

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Heritage Research Center
July 1984

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February 1990

HISTORY

Begun in 1912, the Troy-Libby Highway was the result of local and federal promotional, funding, and construction efforts. The Lincoln County Commissioners were first and foremost concerned with providing an east-west link between Libby, the county seat, and Troy, and thereby make the county more unified economically and politically. The highway was also promoted, both locally and regionally, as a link in the "trunkline" from Glacier National Park to Spokane, Washington, and beyond. (The trunkline was actually part of a transcontinental route which shortly thereafter became known as the Theodore Roosevelt International Highway, now U.S. Highway 2.) Not long after construction began, the U.S. Forest Service became involved in the project, and built several difficult sections of the 16 mile job. This was one of the earliest projects in Montana on which federal funds were expended for local road construction. The length of the construction period (three years) in large part reflects the difficult construction through the mountainous terrain. That same rugged terrain, however, provided the impressive scenic views from the new highway which were often mentioned by promoters.

A. ROAD CONSTRUCTION BY COUNTIES IN MONTANA

Between about 1869 and 1927, Montana counties were the leaders in road construction in the state. Dissatisfied with the work of toll road/bridge companies who dominated road construction during the 1860s, the people of Montana, through the 5th Territorial Legislature, stripped the companies of their monopoly and put construction in the hands of the counties.[1] Road construction and maintenance were among the primary roles of counties, and in fact the politics of roads and bridges was in several instances responsible even for the existence of counties. Among other reasons, dissatisfaction with county government resulted in county busting or splitting and commissioners attempting to keep counties intact found that strategically placed roads and bridges kept constituents happy. [2] Many counties responded to the legislated responsibility to build and maintain roads by issuing bonds to raise money to make the most critical of improvements.

In the earliest years of county control, the roads were valued primarily for the access they provided farmers to railroad shipping points.[3] However, as the turn of the century came and went, the United States as a whole increased demand for good roads. That demand was mainly due to the efforts of the League of Wheelmen, which was also instrumental in the establishment and success of the Office of Road Inquiry (ORI), the forerunner of the Bureau of Public Roads and Federal Highway Administration.[4] Eventually, the better roads lobby became so strong that the advisory role of the ORI and its successors was supplemented in 1916 by direct financial assistance to states.[5] This financial assistance came with strings attached and was ultimately responsible for the creation and/or reorganization of state departments across the United States. The Montana Highway Commission was formed in 1913, but did not assume from counties full control over federal aid highway design and construction projects until 1927.[6]

Lincoln County's successful work on the Troy-Libby highway illustrates several aspects of road construction in Montana during the 1910s and 1920s time when local governments across the United States were making the transition from construction of farm-to-market roads by counties to construction of trunklines by states and federal agencies. 1) As a newly formed county (1909), Lincoln County embarked on an ambitious program of road improvement, as did many other Montana counties at that time.[7] 2) At the beginning of construction on the Troy-Libby Highway, the Montana Highway Commission had not been established and counties could expect no assistance, even advisory, from the state. Lincoln County planned to depend entirely on its own resources to finance the highway. Even after the Commission was formed, it had no involvement in Lincoln County's project. 3) The interest in better roads was heating up in Montana, not just to accommodate local traffic but also cross-country travel. For example, by 1910 talk had begun about developing the Yellowstone Trail, initially meant to link the Twin Cities (Minnesota) and Yellowstone National Park.[8] However, the role of the automobile in fueling interest was minimal on the local level. There were just over 6000 cars and trucks in Montana shortly after Troy-Libby highway construction began.[9] 4) Finally, the federal government was on the verge of initiating a significant federal aid program to states (1916). It had been "easing" itself into such a program since the early days of the ORI when object lesson (demonstration) road projects were built at certain locations across the United States to promote good roads[10]. With the passage of the Agricultural Appropriation Act of 1912, the Forest Service was authorized to spend up to 10% of its annual receipts for the construction of roads and trails --this in the same year the construction began on the Troy-Libby Highway. [11] Beginning in 1916, the federal government was involved with road construction in a big way, having offered financial aid directly to states as authorized by the Federal Aid Road Act of 1916.

B. PLANNING FOR THE 1915 TROY - LIBBY HIGHWAY

Flathead County, the predecessor of Lincoln County (established in 1909), created road districts beginning in the 1890s, but attempts failed between then and 1911 to have either the entire Troy-Libby route surveyed or to appropriate funds for constructing a reliable wagon road.

The year 1911 saw determined efforts on the part of the Lincoln County Commissioners to establish "a comprehensive system of highways" in the county.[12] A new series of road districts was created.[13] In September 1911, the county commissioners submitted a successful bond proposition of \$125,000 for the construction of roads and bridges in the county.[14] At that time, the county commissioners formally resolved to construct a system of roads and bridges in the county, one section of which was to run "westerly along the southerly side of the ... Kootenai River [from the city of Libby] to the Village of Troy." [15]

The county commissioners' interest in the Troy-Libby route was spurred by the very poor condition of the existing road which was little more than a trail. Community leaders envisioned that road construction would contribute to development of the area by improving transportation and communication between the two towns and decreasing the isolation of this part of the Kootenai Valley. Joining Libby, the county seat, with Troy, the road would make Lincoln County more unified politically and economically, and more conscious of itself as an attraction for tourists.

By June 1912, county commissioners of Flathead and Lincoln Counties, Montana; Bonner County, Idaho; and Pen D'Oreille and Spokane Counties, Washington along with commercial organizations from these counties discussed the "trunkline" from Glacier to Spokane. The American Automobile Association of New York was also promoting the proposed road through those counties as part of a trans-continental highway through Spokane and Seattle.[16] The commissioners of the five counties formally resolved to:

constitute a committee to investigate and select a route from Spokane through the Kootenai & Flathead Valleys, to the Glacier Park ... [17]

These political figures saw the scenic qualities of the highway, especially that part to be constructed near the Kootenai Falls, as a means of attracting tourists to these areas.

The Western News heartily supported local and regional efforts to build the Troy-Libby road, maintaining that:

Its construction would open the country from end to end and would also open a wagon highway between the east and west ... cutting the country through the center.[18]

The article also foresaw the highway as part of a Glacier Park to Spokane highway which would be used by a new breed of motoring tourists. It stated that proper surveying and construction would make the route "a magnificent automobile road" and once completed:

it would not be long until buzz wagons from far and wide would make an effort to take the ride along the Kootenai River.[19]

With no realistic idea about the difficulty of the job ahead of them, all parties expected that the road would be completed by October 1, 1912. However, they had to wait three more years for the work to be done.

C. CONSTRUCTION CHRONOLOGY

By August 1912, Lincoln County Surveyor J.M. Duthie was surveying portions of the road between Libby and Troy with at least two crews, one working west from Rankin (about halfway between Libby and Kootenai Falls) and one working west of Libby.[20] Construction was proceeding in September with,

The road being crowned, drainage provided for and ... the foundation ... being laid for a top dressing of crushed rock or gravel at a later time.[21]

By December 5, 1912, the 6 mile section between Kootenai Falls and Troy was "practically completed, although five miles remained to be constructed between Kootenai Falls and Rankin." [22]

In that same year, the road construction project received a needed boost with the passage of that year's Agricultural Appropriations Act which enabled the Forest Service to expend 10 percent of its receipts to construct roads and trails. This legislation made possible major road building on the forests, primarily for the benefit of the public.[23] In October, 1912, the Kootenai Forest Supervisor was notified that the Forest had received \$8151.55 toward construction of part of the highway between Libby and Troy.[24] In November, supplies were sent from Troy to Kootenai Falls for road construction.[25]

A 20 man Forest Service crew began working on the falls section of the road November 19. Two bunkhouses and a cookhouse were constructed for the workmen who were employed throughout the winter. Work in the rock-cliff section of the route was slow and by January 23, 1913, only about 1/2 mile of roadway had been constructed through the section. At that time, about two miles of "rock work in the vicinity of the falls remained" before "connection could be made with the road east from Troy." [26]

The Kootenai National Forest received another \$8000 appropriation for work in the Kootenai Falls section in August, 1913.[27] By September, about two miles of the falls section was complete, with about one mile of solid rock work remaining before the section between the falls and Troy was complete. Five miles of the road between Libby and Rankin and a "small section" between Rankin and the falls was complete. About four miles of "heavy work" remained after the falls-area rock work was completed, which at the time was estimated would take another year.[28]

County officials continued to press for completion of the road during the summer of 1914, seeking aid of state officials. In July L.H. Faust, owner of the Western News, and Paul D. Pratt, county commissioner, organized "a big state excursion of

state officials," beaded by Governor Stewart, from Helena to Libby. The men were accompanied by a "moving picture man who made a film that was widely circulated throughout the country." [29] State aid was not forthcoming, however.

By the end of the summer, most of the heavy rock work remained to be done, although the "outlet" to the west of Troy was complete to Spokane. [30] Construction costs for the four miles between the falls and Rankin was estimated at \$15,000. [31] In an October 2, 1914 letter from Paul Pratt to the District Forester in Missoula County, the county commissioner stated that if the Forest Service would spend \$7500 to construct:

that part of the Troy-Libby road beginning at Station 0 of the Kootenai Falls-Rankin section and extending as far east along Engineer Duthie's survey as may be completed with this amount, and also undertakes the construction of the grade change to eliminate the steep hill at the east end of the section of road previously constructed by the Forest Service, we [the county] agree to exert every possible effort to complete all other sections of the whole project at the expense of the County and to perform finishing work and surfacing necessary on all sections of the road just as quickly as available funds will permit. [32]

This offer was apparently accepted by the Forest Service because it was budgeted \$14,500 in the spring of 1915 to construct the remaining Forest Service section. [33] This brought the total financial contribution from that federal agency to about \$30,000. Forest Service construction work again centered in the falls area. Cheatham, called "the most forceful and capable engineer in the forestry department," supervised falls-area work done under the "force account system," in which the department hired its own men, obtained its own supplies and "personally superintend[ed] the construction." Cheatham supervised a crew of about 50 men from April to June. [34] His work consisted of new construction and "betterment work" on the section completed over the previous two years, including more substantial retaining walls, road widening, and construction of "suitable turnout places at convenient points." [35] Part of the reconstruction work consisted of changing one section of the road from a 15% to an 8% grade. [36] This presumably was the Cedar Creek switchback.

During the spring of 1915, the county also proceeded with its work on the section between the falls and Rankin. Contracts were signed in April, May, and June with J.J. Cummings for the Lake Creek Bridge at \$1088.50, with Gitner and Clume for 4900 feet at \$4700, with Henry Howell for 2600 feet at \$2500, with Sanders and Williams for 1700 feet at \$1200, with Leightner and Lamey for 2300 feet at \$1100, and with Scott Anderson for four bridges at \$840. [37] Among the sections constructed using county funds as the Cedar Creek switchback constructed in 1915 in Section 24, Township 31 North, Range 32 West. [38] This was not part of the original construction plan, but had to be reconstructed because:

when the [east and west] ends of construction were opposite, the line from the east was on the flat near the bottom of the hill, and the line from the west was on the hillside considerably higher up.[39]

The road was completed in the third week of June, 1915. Representatives from the Chambers of Commerce of Spokane, Kalispell, Sandpoint, and Bonners Ferry traveled to Libby for the opening ceremonies to hail the completion of another link in the transcontinental highway and one of the most scenic roads in the country. In 1930 the Theodore Roosevelt International Highway was dedicated to its namesake at ceremonies held at Marias Pass at the south edge of Glacier Park.[40]

The highway failed to live up to promoters' expectations, both that it would completely change the face of commercial transportation between Troy and Libby and that it would dramatically increase the numbers of tourists to the region. Despite reconstruction work performed in 1915, the road was steep and narrow and had several sharp corners. Accidents were numerous and local residents continued to take the train between Troy and Libby.[41] The 1920 Bureau of Public Roads study determined that the road was used primarily by tourists from outside the immediate area.

D. BIOGRAPHICAL MATERIAL - PAUL D. PRATT

During Lincoln County's early push for road improvement, Paul D. Pratt served as the chairman of the board of county commissioners. Pratt promoted the Troy-Libby highway project in a wide region and to a wide audience of local, state, regional, and national travel enthusiasts and administrators.

Paul Pratt was born in 1878 in Moberly, Missouri, where he received his early education. He graduated from the Montana State School of Mines in Butte in 1905 and worked briefly for the Montana Copper Company and the Red Metal Copper Company, both of Butte. In 1907, Pratt moved to Libby where he began his own business in assaying and mining engineering. While in Libby, he was chairman of the board of county commissioners (after 1909 when Lincoln County was formed) at a time when the county was engaged in an intensive road construction and repair program.[42]

While in Libby, Pratt had an interest in at least one other development project. Acting as "the duly authorized agent of Joseph A. Coram" and later as an official of the Kootenai Power Construction Company, Pratt unsuccessfully applied for a permit to construct a dam and power plant at Kootenai Falls in 1911 and 1912.[43] In 1917, Pratt moved to Helena where he had accepted a position with the then newly reorganized Montana Highway Commission as "Engineer of the Highway Department." [44] Shortly thereafter, the administration of the department was

changed, and the positions of "Engineer of the Highway Department" and "Engineer of the Bridge Department" were combined into one position, the Chief Engineer. Pratt became the Montana Highway Department's first Chief Engineer, a position which he held until late summer of 1919.[45]

At that time, Pratt and two others formed the State Engineering and Construction Company and began bidding on highway construction jobs advertised by the state. Pratt's partners in the business were M.F. Curran of Missoula, a former Montana Highway Commission member, and L.C. Beattie. In May 1920, the company acquired a fourth partner, A.W. Mahon, another former highway commissioner from Glasgow, and changed its name to the Western Construction Company.[46] The Western Construction Company was awarded several contracts by the Highway Commission through 1920 and 1921, but by late 1922 was not bidding on projects and may have been disbanded. Three years later one of the four partners, A.W. Mahon, became the Montana Highway Department Division Engineer at Great Falls, but Pratt had disappeared from sight.[47] Pratt no longer lived in Helena and efforts to trace his whereabouts after 1922 were unsuccessful.[48]

DESCRIPTION OF THE HIGHWAY

The 1915 highway is a single-lane dirt and rock road measuring about 15 feet wide. The total length of the original road was about 16 miles, but today only about 9.3 miles of it remains in good to excellent condition and is included within the boundaries of the National Register eligible site. These 9.3 miles are covered by 9 discontinuous segments, labeled Sections A-G, J, and L during recent site recordation and evaluation. Each of the sections are described here both as they appeared before 1988-1990 highway construction, and as they will appear after construction is completed next year.

Section A is a 750 foot long segment at the Libby end of the old highway. This is a narrow dirt road having relatively little cut and fill, with the exception of the eastern half of it which has recently been used as a logging road. This use has completely changed the character of the old highway. At least 300 feet of the western end of this segment has been removed by 1988-1990 highway construction.

Section B is a 2200 foot long segment which, like Segment A, involves little cut and fill. A short rock wall is located near the west end of Section B. Much of the segment is readily recognized because it has been cleared and used by a utility company for access to its line. Almost all of the segment, including the rock wall, has been destroyed during recent highway improvement.

Section C lies on terrain similar to that of the previous two segments and so involves primarily short cut and fill sections. It is 1500 feet long, and all of it will be removed during highway construction.

Section D is a longer segment than the previous three, winding for about 7400 feet. Small pieces have been destroyed by cultivation and the bridge across Cedar Creek is long since gone. The entire segment is overgrown with trees and is difficult to follow. Between 1300 and 1500 feet at the western end of Section D has been destroyed during recent highway construction.

Section E is one of two outstanding segments of the 1915 Troy-Libby Highway. It is 2.2 miles long and much of it stands high on the hillside above the Kootenai River and modern-day U.S. Highway 2. It includes some of the best rock retaining wall features of the old road. Section E also provides some of the scenic views of the Kootenai River for which the historic highway was known. Beginning at the east end of the segment, the dirt road climbs upward, switching back twice. Along this stretch, a rock wall rises 6 feet tall for several feet. There is a second, shorter wall nearby. Two collapsed log and plank bridges lie further to the west. The remains of a third log bridge across an unnamed gulley (Photograph HAER No. MT-66-14 and 15); the alignment of the road was apparently changed after the bridge was no longer usable and now curves sharply up the gulley. To the west of this gulley, the road crossed flat terrain which rarely provides a view of the Kootenai River below. Road construction in this area consisted of little more than clearing trees and light grading. About 1/4 mile from the west end of Segment E are an outstanding rock retaining wall and causeway. In this area, the road is cut into a rock outcrop at one point and at another is supported by rock retaining walls (Photograph HAER No. MT-66-6 through 8). The road also crosses over a 40-50 foot long stone causeway with retaining walls. The causeway is 15 feet high on the downhill (north) side and 3 feet on the uphill side (Photograph HAER No. MT-66-9).

Very little of Section E has been destroyed by the ongoing highway construction. About 20 feet at the west end and 30 feet at the east end have been removed; all bridges and retaining walls remain intact.

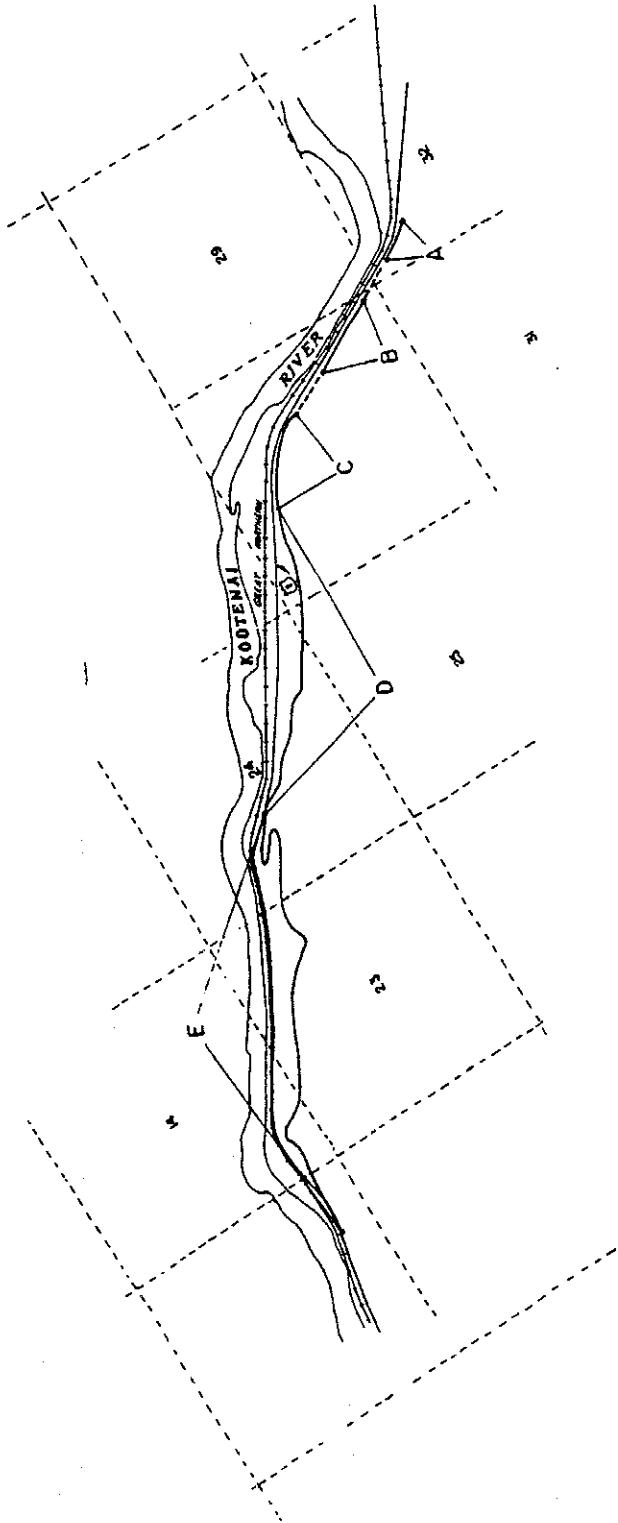
Section F is 1700 feet long and lies in only fair condition. The first 500 feet on the west end is approximately even with the surrounding terrain and about one-third of its route is obscured by a labyrinth of more recent dirt roads. The next 250 feet has been partially cut on its north side by a gravel quarrying or placer mining operation and is completely overgrown. The following 350 feet is also overgrown and resembles a ditch more than a road. The final 600 foot portion is also overgrown, but the route can be recognized. All of Section F has been destroyed during recent highway construction.

Section G is the second section of the 1915 Troy-Libby Highway which lies in good-to-excellent condition and provides scenic views of the Kootenai River Valley. This segment is also 2.2 miles long. Among the notable engineering features are a series of curving rock retaining walls, totalling over 150 feet in length. On the top of one wall one can see where a steel pipe guardrail was once attached (Photograph HAER No. MT-66-2). Segment G includes much more cut and fill than other sections of the road. Cuts through rock outcrops and along very steep hillsides are common (Photograph HAER No. MT-66-1). About 350 feet of the east end of Section G has been removed during recent

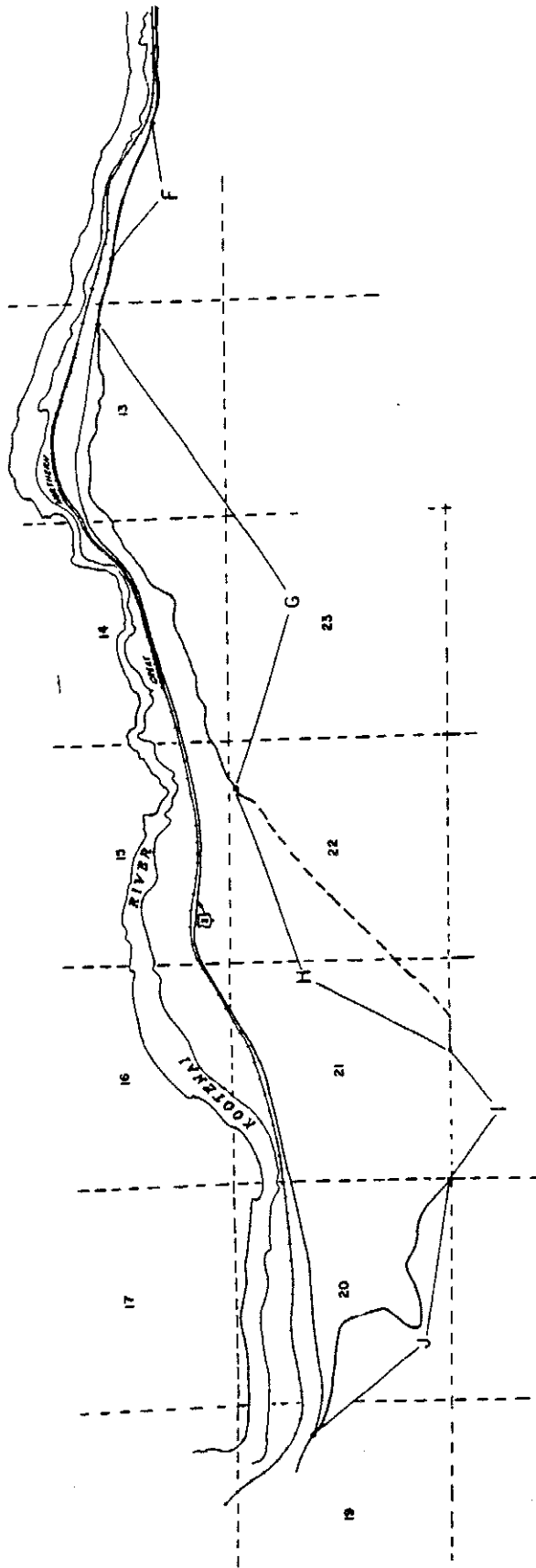
highway construction. In addition, another 1000 feet or so has been widened and in one area the adjacent hillside removed to provide for a powder magazine. This 1000-foot section will be reconstructed shortly to return the historic road and hillside to its near-original form.

Section J is a 1 1/2 mile section that lies 200 feet or more above modern-day U.S. Highway 2. It remains in its original form. Most of it runs through flat terrain, and no noteworthy engineering features were observed during inventory. Modern highway construction has not affected this segment.

Section L is a short, 700 foot long segment, similar in form and condition to Section J. It also has not been affected by recent highway construction.



1915 TROY - LIBBY HIGHWAY
SECTIONS A-E



1915 TROY-LIBBY HIGHWAY
SECTIONS F-J

ENDNOTES

- 1) Montana State Highway Department, History of the Montana State Highway Department 1913-1942, (Helena, 1943), 5-6.
- 2) Michael P. Malone and Richard B. Roeder, Montana: A History of Two Centuries, (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), 190-191.
- 3) Carl F. Wohlgenant, "Development of the Federal-Aid Highway System in Montana" (Master's thesis, Montana State University, Missoula, 1954), 27.
- 4) Ibid, 34, 45, 50.
- 5) Bruce E. Seely, Building the American Highway System. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 30, 42-43.
- 6) Ibid, 15.
- 7) Fredric L. Quivik, Historic Bridges in Montana, (Denver: National Park Service, 1982), 30-31.
- 8) Katherine Huppe, Literature Search, Emigrant-Gardiner 69kV, (Butte: Highland Technical Services, for Montana Power Company, 1988), 218.
- 9) Wohlgenant, 33.
- 10) Seely, 30.
- 11) Montana Highway News (Helena: Montana Highway Commission, December 1922), 5
- 12) Western News (Libby), 12 January 1911.
- 13) Lincoln County Commissioners Proceedings, Vol. 1, p. 169.
- 14) Western News, 7 September 1911.
- 15) Lincoln County Commissioners Proceedings, Vol. 1, 18 September 1911.
- 16) Western News, 6 April 1911.
- 17) Ibid.
- 18) Lincoln County Commissioners Proceedings, 5 June 1912.

- 19) Western News, 27 June 1912.
- 20) Western News, 15 August 1912, 29 August 1912.
- 21) Western News, 5 September 1912.
- 22) Western News, 5 December 1912.
- 23) U.S. Department of Agriculture, Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), 524.
- 24) Western News, 3 October 1912.
- 25) Western News, 7 November 1912.
- 26) Western News, 23 January 1913.
- 27) Western News, 7 August 1913.
- 28) Western News, 11 September 1913.
- 29) Western News, 18 June 1914.
- 30) Western News, 30 July 1914, 27 August 1914.
- 31) Western News, 27 August 1914.
- 32) Lincoln County Commissioners Proceedings, Vol. 1, 549.
- 33) Western News, 18 March 1915.
- 34) Ibid.
- 35) Western News, 22 April 1915.
- 36) Western News, 29 April 1915.
- 37) Lincoln County Commissioners Proceedings, Vol. 2, 15 April 1915, 13; 13 May 1915, 18; 7 June 1915, 29.
- 38) U.S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Public Roads, "Preliminary Investigation: Cedar Creek Switchback Project, Montana, January 31, 1920." Kootenai National Forest Supervisor's Office, Libby, Montana.
- 39) Western News, 24 June 1915.

- 40) Site form for 24LN237 (1915 Troy-Libby Highway), Montana State Historic Preservation Office, Helena, Montana.
- 41) Ibid.
- 42) Western News, 5 December 1912, 11 September 1913; Helen F. Sanders, A History of Montana (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1913), 1724
- 43) E.W. Kramer, "District Engineer's Report on Application of Kootenai Power Construction Company for a Final Water Power Permit on the Kootenai River near Libby, Montana, Kootenai National Forest," 1913, U.S.D.A. Forest Service Federal Archives and Records Center, Seattle, Washington.
- 44) Polk's Kalispell, Flathead and Lincoln Counties Directory, 1917-1918; Montana Highway Commission, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, 7 July 1917.
- 45) Montana Highway Commission, Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee, 20 February 1918, 20 November 1919.
- 46) R.L. Polk & Company's Helena City Directory 1920; Montana Highway Commission, Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting 12 April 1917, 3 October 1919, 15 January 1920, 28 May 1920.
- 47) Montana Highway Commission, 26 April 1920, 20 August 1920, 16 September 1921, 27 April 1925.
- 48) R.L. Polk & Company's Helena City Directory, 1925.